

**Montague Finance Committee
Final Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 17, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.**

This meeting was held via Zoom and recorded: <https://vimeo.co/647360427>

PRESENT: Jen Audley, Chair; Greg Garrison, Vice-Chair; Fred Bowman John Hanold, Chris Menegoni, Jennifer Waryas and Francia Wisnewski, members

OTHERS PRESENT: Carolyn Olsen, Town Accountant; Steve Ellis, Town Administrator, Ariel Elan, resident and BettyLou Mallet, Scribe.

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. This meeting is being recorded by MCTV as well as by Carolyn Olsen at the Town Hall. JA stated the purpose of this meeting is to receive updates from the Capital Improvements Committee (CIC).
2. **Approval of the minutes from November 10, 2021 Finance Committee Meeting** – The members received and reviewed the minutes of November 10, 2021. On a motion by JH and seconded by FB, the minutes were approved as written. No discussion. **JH, aye; FB, aye; JW, aye; FW, aye; GG, aye; CM, aye; JA, aye. Approved unanimously.**
3. **Town Administrator and Town Accountant Updates** – Steve Ellis stated that the updates from his position will be given in the CIC presentation. He mentioned that due to the fact that three members of the CIC were present, there will not be any discussion among them as it was not an official meeting. CO did not have any updates.

Before the presentation is given, JA asked Steve to forward the proposal for increasing staffing in the Selectboard office in FY23 which he presented to the Selectboard so the FinCom may be kept up-to-date. She also stated the Montague dates for the focus groups hosted by the Six Town Regionalization Planning Board will be tomorrow at the Town Hall and November 22, 2021. Alan Genovese is the Chair of the 6-Town Regionalization Committee.

4. Capital Improvements Committee (CIC) Updates

The FinCom had the opportunity to review information that was distributed prior to the presentation; Summary of FY22-23 Capital Article Requests, Montague Town Bridges and the Whetstone Structural Engineering Report. GG began the presentation by reviewing the summary of article requests for the FY22 Winter STM and May 2022 ATM, stating this is a document that is updated frequently as the requests are submitted and refined. For instance, a request from the DPW for additional funds for sidewalks has been received but not added to the list yet. The CIC is tasked with the best way to develop and present a timeline over a period of 5 years. The CIC has been asked to present to the town at the town meeting, a multi-year plan that can be used as described in the financial policies.

GG opened the dialogue for opinions on the best approach on how to present the information. JH feels it is a great idea to create the Capital Plan as it is helpful for the FinCom to be involved and be aware of short-term and long-term financial planning for major items.

FW questions the estimations on costs and if there is a formula used for projected figures. GG described future planning such as in business takes a total number over a 5-year projection, set aside or bookmark dollar amounts what is believed to be costs going forward and possibly a hedge for unexpected costs. This is similar to what is in the financial policy as a 5-year plan.

GG also noted another hurdle the CIC is facing is “real time”. One ongoing issue is the water pollution control facility is a huge expense and cannot be avoided. The facility requires a lot of updating due to regulations and safety and therefore the financial needs and its funding needs to be discussed.

JW spoke of “bandaids” and asks if the town has information which audits the need to “fix” things is the mindset of future planning to be given to the public. GG said the idea is of a 5-year plan where taking the best information such as building assessments and department needs, come up with a number for town meeting on an annual basis with the thought there may be needs to be dealt with.

Ariel Elan spoke of the burden of unfunded mandates and increased costs due to state legislation along with her impression at Town Meetings of residents not wanting to spend money. She appreciates the CIC promoting these plans so that the Town does not keep limping along and fall behind on maintenance of infrastructure.

CM likes the idea of the CIC plan and the addition of building assessments and long-term plans and how the CIC can piece information together from different departments and create a plan of what needs to be done.

JA appreciates the CIC taking on this task and acknowledge that it seems overwhelming. A multi-year capital plan will help people to know what the issues are of capital needs and possible bottlenecks within the coming 3-4 years. To be focused on a more comprehensive picture and not so focused on costs. Also to keep in mind that the town’s contributions and funding for capital improvements is not the only funding. There are other resources available and it would be helpful for the CIC to give ideas on how these extra funds can be used. She also likes the idea of earmarking amounts of spending and setting aside funds to plan for unanticipated needs.

GG also spoke of the bridge report and feels that the best way to identify these items is to make sure to have timely assessments on the roads and bridges as part of the expense.

FW asks if there are any implications on hiring support staff as it is a substantial project for volunteers. GG stated the CIC has thought of support and it may be part of the Capital Improvements budget. The goal is to present an initial plan or framework by May 4, 2022. This plan should also include the debt of the town as long-term improvements and costs intertwined with the debt schedule and possible additional spending and a timeline for the spending.

JA also thought what would be helpful in the capital plan is to have projects that are complicated/significant described in the timeline and what the cost may be. Flag the projects that need attention and a timeline to complete. Also gauge the small and medium projects and the funds needed.

5. **Review Schedule and Topics for Upcoming Meetings** – Future scheduled meetings are December 8 and 15, 2021. Steve is unavailable for December 8. Budget requests deadline is December 13 so therefore the December 8 meeting will be to review the FinCom budget and Reserve Fund request. Sketch out a calendar for budget development and what meetings will look like. Also spend time digging into educational related topics. By December 15, the FinCom should receive most of the requests and budget workbook and acknowledge receipt of those items to officially begin the review process. Also a time to return to the discussion on the Reserve Fund Policy.

On a motion by JH and seconded by FB, the meeting adjourned at 7:27 p .m. FB, aye; JH, aye; JW, aye; GG, aye, FW, aye; CM, aye; JA aye.

Respectfully submitted

BettyLou Mallet
Scribe

Approved by Finance Committee: 12/08/2021